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Leaksmanship: naming names, starting with Al

WASHINGTON—It is the most ludicrous quest since Lewis Carroll wrote "The Hunting of the Snark." In an effort to seek out and staunch leaks by government officials, the Reagan administration has ordered that none of its employees is to talk to a newsmen without first securing the approval of a "senior official."



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How absurd. In the immortal Washington phrase, "the ship of state is the only ship that leaks at the top." It is the "senior officials" who tell the most damaging tales, not low-level saboteurs in the bureaucratic woodwork.

Those with long memories will recall that the very phrase "senior official" was for seven years the nom de guerre of

Henry Kissinger, leaker par excellence. With a whisper here, a quip there, a nod and a wink in the appropriate direction, Kissinger confounded his enemies, charmed the press and secured the enactment of his own policies. Kissinger, of course, denounced leaks as loudly as the best of them. But he leaked better than most.

He is not alone. To prove the point, let us violate traditional journalistic standards and name some names.

Possibly the most damaging leak to have afflicted the Reagan administration was the disclosure of a U.S. strategy to use conservative Arab regimes to "rein in" Libyan strongman Moammar Khadafy. Terrified that "rein-in" meant assassination by the CIA, Khadafy launched a counter-offensive of his own that may yet prove responsible for the assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and the creation of hit teams targeted on President Reagan. The leaker who set this chain of events in motion: Secretary of State Alexander Haig in an "off-the-record" interview last April.

Haig is also the victim of leaks. High-placed officials have let newsmen know that they are "concerned about his health." They wonder whether "he has been working too hard" and "whether we have put poor Al in the right job." The source: President Ronald Reagan in an incautious conversation at the White House Radio and Television Correspondents Dinner. You can't get to be a more senior official than Reagan.

Haig was further outraged at a detailed newspaper account last March disclosing that Vice President George Bush, not Haig, would be in charge of crisis management. The source of the leak, which nearly led Haig's resignation . . . On second thought, I not name this senior official. He has been good

HAIG AUTHORIZED two of his own aides, Richard Burt and spokesman Dean Fischer, to leak an account of how Haig had outmaneuvered UN Ambassador Jeanne Kirkpatrick to secure the correct language of a UN resolution last June. Caught at it, he was called on the carpet by Reagan, who ordered him to keep his staff in line. Burt was nearly fired.

The most consistent — and equally damaging — leaker of the Reagan era has been Budget Director David Stockman, a "senior official" who met privately with a reporter for eight months and disclosed his doubts about the arithmetic and equity of Reaganomics. The interviews provided the basis for a devastating article in *The Atlantic Monthly*.

Democrats leak too. Defense Secretary Harold Brown, a senior official, disclosed the existence of the Stealth bomber in the summer of 1980 to help Jimmy Carter's campaign. Before him, President Lyndon Johnson leaked the existence of the SR-71 spy plane.

Former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski was such a prolific leaker that State Department spokesman Hodding Carter said of one Zbig-favored reporter, "When he writes, you can see Brzezinski's lips move."

When Brzezinski leaked an account of conventional-arms talks in Mexico City, an account in which U.S. negotiator Leslie Gelb of the State Department appeared disloyal, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance authorized Gelb to leak his side of the story to *The Washington Post*.

Leaks come from people who are not bound by White House memos. Former Sen. Frank Church leaked the existence of the Soviet brigade in Cuba. The recent leak of the Reagan administration's decision not to sell advanced jets to Taiwan most probably came from Sen. Jesse Helms, a conservative who feels that Reagan is breaking his campaign promises.

So Reagan and his new national security adviser, William Clark, can issue all the directives they want. The mid-level bureaucrats will be so terrorized that they won't even be caught in casual conversation with reporters. But it won't do any good. It's the big boys who can't keep their mouths shut.